

Published in the Los Angeles Times, November 22, 2018

The approach David Kirp describes for math education (“How better teachers are made,” Nov. 16) is certainly an improvement. But even major improvements in teaching will not overcome the effects of poverty, unquestionably the strongest factor in school achievement.

Poverty’s effects include food deprivation, insufficient health care, and little access to reading material, each related to school success. The best teaching in the world won’t help when students are hungry, ill, and have nothing to read.

We must deal with poverty: 42% of American children live in families without enough income to cover basics. (NOTE: This sentence was not included in the published version of the letter.)

Until poverty is eliminated, school must protect students from poverty’s impact by investing more in food programs, health care, and libraries.

Martin Luther King came to the same conclusion: “We are likely to find that the problems of housing and education, instead of preceding the elimination of poverty, will themselves be affected if poverty is first abolished.”

Stephen Krashen

<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/readersreact/la-ol-le-jaime-escalante-math-teachers-20181122-story.html>

Martin Luther King quote is from *Final Words of Advice* (1967).